

Amesbury Municipal Council Meeting
December 13, 2005
Town Hall Auditorium

Pledge of Allegiance – Councilor Chandler

Roll Call: Robert Woodsom, Roger Benson, James Chandler, Ann Connolly King, Esther Headley, Anne Larnard, Mario Pinierio, Joseph McMilleon
Christopher Lawrence late

Accept Minutes – November 15, 2005

Councilor Benson motions to accept, Councilor Pinierio second – Voted Unanimous

PUBLIC COMMENT

Master Plan Implementation moved to January 2006

Joshua Handverger informed everyone about the Veterans Toys for Tots program and the Support our Troops Dinner December 22nd at the St. Joseph's Parish Hall.

James Thieverge, 11 ½ Sanborn Terrace – Mr. Thieverge spoke about the use of free cash verses the reserve fund. He feels that free cash should be rebated back to the tax payers and that fees for service is bad management.

Jane Snow, Fern Ave. – Ms. Snow thanks the councilors that are leaving for their service and the new councilors for their willingness to serve.

LICENSE AND PERMITS

2005-126 Common Victualler License – Sal's Pizza, 84B Haverhill Road

President McMilleon reads 2005-126 into the record.

Chris Smith attended the meeting to represent Sal's Pizza.

Councilor Pinierio motions to accept as submitted.

Councilor Chandler second

Voted – 7 Yes – 1 Recuse (Benson), Not present (Lawrence)

2005-124 Pole Hearing – Chester Street

President McMilleon reads 2005-124 into the record.

Dave Bouche, Representing National Grid, USA – Mr. Bouche explains that the new pole is need because of increased demand for electricity. The existing pole on the other side of Chester Street will not support the extra lines needed. Charles Trottier, 35 Prospect Street is an abutter and is opposed to having the pole placed in front of his house. He does not see the point in changing the location of the pole to his side of the street. Dick Sterns, 37 Prospect Street is an abutter and does not see the rational or the necessity to move the pole to the other side of Chester Street. Dave Bouche states that there are other possible solutions that would have to come from the engineer.

Councilor Chandler motions to take no action.

Councilor Pinierio second
Voted – 8 Yes, 1 not present (Lawrence)

2005-127 2006 License Renewals

President McMilleon reads 2005-127 into the record.

Councilor Pinierio motions to accept 2005-127 as submitted.
Councilor Lawrence second

Councilor Chandler has a concern about environmental issues with Auto Class III, Martin Road Salvage.

Voted – 8 Yes, 1 No (Chandler)

PUBLIC HEARINGS

2005-60 Amend Rule 5F “Public Comment” of the Amesbury Municipal Council Fourth Session Rules and Procedures – Councilor Lawrence sponsor cont.

President McMilleon reads 2005-60 into the record.

Councilor Lawrence motions to withdraw 2005-60
Councilor Benson second
Voted – Unanimous

2005-81 An Ordinance to see if the Municipal Council will accept a donation of land from Woodsom Limited Partnership – Mayor Hildt sponsor cont.

President McMilleon reads 2005-81 into the record

Councilor Benson moves that the council takes no action
Councilor Lawrence second
Voted – Unanimous

2005-82 An Ordinance to Amend the Amesbury Zoning Bylaw Section XI.J2 Historic Preservation – Mayor Hildt sponsor

President McMilleon reads 2005-82 into the record.

Councilor Woodsom motions to take no action
Councilor Benson second
Voted – Unanimous

2005-101E Cultural Center – Equipment \$10,000

President McMilleon reads 2005-101E into the record and opens the public hearing.

Alison Lindstrom, Wells Ave. is against taking the money from free cash she feels the department should look for grants first. The people that rent the Cultural Center should supply their own chairs. Dave Frick, 14 Maudsley View Lane feels the rent collected will pay for the expenses of the center. He states he Rotary Club and many other groups are interested in renting the center and they will need chairs and tables. Jane Snow, Fern Ave states that the center will not be collecting any fees for

non profit groups. She questions who will be overseeing all the maintenance associated with the center. Jim Thieverage, Sanborn Terrace feel that the center will be competing with the private sector.

President McMilleon closes the public hearing.

Councilor Benson is in favor of 2005-101E but is concerned about what will happen to the rest of free cash. Josh Handverger states he did speak to the Mayor about free cash and he was unsure at the time.

Councilor Chandler feels there is space at the Carriage Museum for functions; the Cultural Center should be sold to give the business to the Carriage Museum.

Councilor King supports the measure; she feels the town should be very proud of this space.

Councilor Headley supports 2005-101E and suggests that any fees collected above the maintenance and operating expenses should go to free cash.

Councilor Larnard supports buying the furniture. She feels it is the final piece of developing the upper millyard and the upper millyard is part of the master plan.

Councilor Woodsom moves to approve as submitted

Councilor Larnard

Voted – 6 Yes, 3 No (Chandler, Lawrence, Pinierio)

2005-118 An Order to increase the exemption amount of qualified applicants – Mayor Hildt sponsor

President McMilleon reads 2005-118 into the record and opens the public hearing.

Hearing no comments closes the public hearing.

Councilor Lawrence moves for approval of 2005-118 as submitted

Councilor Benson second

Roll Call Vote – Unanimous

2005-119 An Order to hold the Annual Classification Hearing – Mayor Hildt sponsor cont.

President McMilleon reads 2005-119 into the record and opens the public hearing.

Bill Piercey, 48 Cedar Street feels that by splitting the rate the property owner is not going to experience any major relief in their taxes. Splitting the rate will only hurt the small business owners. With the Mass employment and economy down and a healthcare reform bill it will force businesses to move to New Hampshire. He states that no other community in the area has a split rate. Peter Mertinooke, General Manager, Amesbury Group states that his building has 8,000 sq ft owned by an international company that employees 85 people. Splitting the tax rate will send the wrong message to his parent company. It will discourage growth and investment in this community. Kevin Murphy, Pleasant Valley Rd feels that businesses should pay fair share. Homeowner values and taxes are going up while the business values and tax is staying the same. Alison Lindstrom, Wells Ave. does not feel the amount of relief to the homeowners justifies hurting the small businesses in town. The businesses are hurting and they do not use the resources in town like the homeowner. She feels it will push businesses out of town to New Hampshire. Robert Gonthier, Amesbury Alliance states that

a split rate is the wrong way to solve high taxes; you need to control spending. He feels that some businesses in town would not be here if there was a split rate. The businesses do a lot to support the community. He states there is a lot of vacant space in town and it will stay vacant if the rate is split. Dennis Welcome, Amesbury Alliance feels the housing market is flattening and values will be going down and so will taxes. He says that the businesses have a lot of extra expenses such as decorations, flowers, community charities and adopt a spot that are no cost to the town. The businesses do not use as many services in town as homeowners. There are large businesses going in Seabrook, NH that are going to hurt the downtown. He urges the council not to split the tax rate. Jim Noonan, Raydar Co. moved his company from Merrimack to Amesbury; he feels that Amesbury needs to build the commercial base in order to control taxes. Donna McClure, Paige Farm Rd. feels that the single tax rate has not generated a larger commercial base so she feels the tax rate should be split to keep the homeowners from being taxed unfairly. Michelle Thone, Hunt Road feels that a modest tax split will not hurt the businesses. The number of businesses in town has doubled over the past 10 years. If the business owners want to control taxes they should come to the budget hearings and council meetings and help control spending. Nicholas Costello, Whitehall Road states that the downtown is being discovered and the merchants are enthusiastic. The Terresphere and lower millyard are starting to happen. We are trying to attract industry and broaden the commercial tax base. A split tax rate along with being so close to New Hampshire will make Amesbury less attractive. David Frick, Maudsley View Lane encourages the council not to split the tax rate. James Thieverge, Sanborn Terrace he does not feel it is the right time to split the tax rate.

President McMilleon closes the public hearing.

Councilor Woodsom states that all the surrounding communities do not split their rate especially along the New Hampshire border. If you follow the Massachusetts/New Hampshire border west until you come to the Vermont; which is a 6% tax rate you all of a sudden have towns with a split tax rate. He does not feel that the relief felt by the homeowners will offset the burden felt by the businesses.

Councilor Chandler states that commercial property doesn't sell as frequently as residential and therefore the residential values go up more often. He feels that the state understands that and provides the option of a split rate for cities and towns. He is not looking the hurt the business just to help compensate the homeowner for over assessments.

Councilor King does not support splitting the tax rate. Haverhill first split their tax rate in 1984 when 70% was residential and 30% business now it is 89% residential /11% business and the downtown is crippled with many empty store fronts. Amesbury has small locally owned creative, artsy businesses. They don't have national funding to cover them for a split rate. She does not feel that you can look at tax relief in this community at any cost. Amesbury needs to build their business base.

Councilor Benson feels that residents won't realize enough relief unless you really whack the businesses hard. Businesses do not use the services that homeowners do. A lot of the merchants' downtown are really struggling. He does not support a split rate.

Councilor Lawrence agrees with Councilor Chandler to split the tax rate; he feels it would level the playing field.

Councilor Pinierio also agrees with Councilor Chandler and Councilor Lawrence.

Councilor Larnard feels the rate should not be split. All the towns surrounding Amesbury do not split their rate. Amesbury needs to go forward and build its commercial/industrial base.

President McMilleon closes the hearing and asks for a motion.

Councilor Roger Benson moved a residential factor of 1 to determine the percentage of tax burden to be borne by each class of property.
Councilor Woodsom seconded

Roll Call Vote 6 Yes, 3 No (Lawrence, Pinierio, Chandler)

Councilor Benson moved to not vote a residential exemption for Fiscal Year 2006.
Councilor Woodsom seconded
Roll Call Vote – Unanimous

NEW BUSINESS

2005-125 2006 Meeting Notice for the Amesbury Municipal Council
President McMilleon reads 2005-125 into the record.

Councilor Benson moves to approve 2005-125 as submitted.
Councilor King second.

Councilor Lawrence feels that the current council should not vote a schedule that will be for the new council.

Voted – Unanimous

Councilor Benson motion to adjourn, Councilor Larnard second
Voted Unanimous
10:00PM

Respectfully submitted,
Assistant Town Clerk